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Barbara J. Hampton

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# To Die For: *The Satanic Verses* This Side of September 11— A Review Essay

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by Barbara J. Hampton

The year 1989 is one of those momentous years that history teachers love. Like 1492 and 1776, it was a pivotal year politically and culturally. However, the din of crashing walls and ripping curtains may well have drowned out a slightly quieter event, the publication on February 14 of an Iranian fatwa against Salman Rushdie, the author of *The Satanic Verses*, because he had “dared to insult Muslim sanctities.”<sup>1</sup>

Ayatollah Khomeini’s decree urging zealous Muslims to kill Rushdie presaged more recent global upheavals. Sixteen years after the fatwa, on this side of September 11, Christians who desire to live as world citizens and as ambassadors of the Gospel, both to a decadent western

culture and to our many Muslim neighbors, should attempt to explore with Rushdie the condition and beliefs of so many people caught up in the dislocations of cultural change. Was his literary satire of an oppressive Islam prophetic? Was his caricature of Muhammad wrong? Or were his sophisticated word plays, provocative images, and intriguing postmodern pastiches about something else altogether? As an important postcolonialist voice, Rushdie is a writer to whom people pay attention. Indeed, *The Satanic Verses* attracted much attention. Many people died protesting his book. But books, mere words on pages, are not worth dying for, are they?

First, however, we must have the history lesson. Salman Rushdie, a naturalized British Indian, grew up comfortably in Bombay, Cambridge, and London. Though as an adult Rushdie moves with ease in elite British circles, his geographical roots are in India and, secondarily, Pakistan; though he is admittedly a secular man, his religious roots are in South Asian Islam. He had won the prestigious Booker Prize for his earlier satiric novel about India, *Midnight’s Children*, which was followed by *Shame*, his scathing exploration of Pakistan’s political situation.

The next natural target for Rushdie’s razor-sharp probe was either England or Islam. He managed to dissect both in *The Satanic Verses*. Although initially praised in western reviews, the book was banned in India, denounced in the Muslim world where people died in the resulting melees, and burned before television cameras by Muslim immigrants in Bradford, England. The Ayatollah Khomeini’s fatwa forced Rushdie into hiding and generated a heated debate about British cultural values, freedom of speech, multiculturalism, and religious rights and privileges.

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Barbara J. Hampton is adjunct instructor at The College of Wooster, in Wooster, Ohio. Ms. Hampton attended Trinity Christian College and Calvin College, completed her B. A. at the University of Michigan, and completed her M. A. at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Her current research focuses on Islam, which she is fieldtesting with Christian and Muslim student friends.

No surprise, then, that after September 11, Rushdie proclaimed in a *New York Times* editorial that President Bush was wrong to exonerate the Muslim faith for the Trade Tower attacks. "Yes," indeed, he thundered, "This is about Islam, a self-exculpatory, paranoiac Islam, a jumbled, half-examined cluster of customs, opinions and prejudices." He argued, "If terrorism is to be defeated, the world of Islam must take on board the secularist-humanist principles on which the modern is based."<sup>2</sup> He had written his famous novel, after all, to excoriate Islam and Britain for failing to live up to his secularist-humanist vision of a modern religion and a tolerant country.

In a nutshell, the plot line of the long, complex, disjointed *Satanic Verses* follows the fortunes of two Anglo-Indians: Gibreel Farishta, an emotionally unstable though wildly popular Indian film star, and Saladin Chamcha, a wealthy radio impersonator English-wanna-be. The two of them survive a terrorist attack on their plane, falling 29,000 feet to be born again (Rushdie's language) on the shores of England, Farishta as the archangel Gabriel and Chamcha as the devil, horns-and-tail-and-all. As they wander around London in their new physical forms, they wreak havoc on a variety of individuals and communities. Finally, having been restored to their original physical forms, they return to India, Farishta to complete disintegration and suicide, and Chamcha, the nastier of the two by far, to rapprochement with his estranged family and to happiness with an old lover.

Which of the two, however, is an angel and which the devil? *The Satanic Verses* is deliberately blurring the good-guy/bad-guy distinction as well as the larger notion of good and evil just as it melds the profane and the sacred. Gibreel Farishta was a womanizing movie star in India, playing all manner of Hindu gods in movie after popular movie. He caused the death of his lover even as he pursued the elusive Alleluia Cone all the way to England. Nevertheless, he cannot leave behind his psychic demons. Thus, when he is reborn as an angel (the literal meaning of his name), he is positioned to act in the dream sequences as the angel of Revelation and the whisperer of Satanic verses.

On the other hand, Chamcha, his name a slangy version of the Hindi S.O.B., is the very model of

the hard-working immigrant, married to a British woman of the highest breeding. He achieves success as an impersonator of any sound that advertisers need—notably in radio, not television where his ethnicity would be apparent. Not particularly happy with the identity he has tried so hard to achieve, he is nevertheless horrified to have become the devil his adopted society has labeled him. Ultimately he is able to sluff off that identity, though he uses his language skills to whisper a few satanic verses of his own, ones that insinuate to Gibreel that Cone has been unfaithful to him. During his journey around London as the angel of judgment, Gibreel rescues Chamcha, his unknown tormenter, from the fire that spreads through parts of the racially tense city. Yes, who is good? Who is bad? Can they be distinguished? Hardly. These confused, changing characters embody the metamorphosis that occurs in the novel at many levels, most importantly as the dilemma of the immigrant.

Five of the nine chapters are set in Bombay or London and trace the changing fortunes of these two immigrant characters. In the aftermath of the furor over his book, Rushdie himself declared in an essay entitled "In Good Faith" that *The Satanic Verses* is "if anything,...a migrant's-eye view of the world. It is written from the very experience of uprooting, disjuncture and metamorphosis that is the migrant condition, and from which, I believe, can be derived a metaphor for all humanity." Migrants are, he believes, uniquely situated to probe the evils of stubborn racism in host countries and "to [celebrate] hybridity ...[and] impurity, intermingling...[to rejoice] in mongrelization and [fear] the absolutism of the Pure."<sup>3</sup>

If that had been the total of the book, it probably would have taken its rightful place in the canon of postcolonial literature out of the view of England's general reading public and Iran's watchdogs. It is the four interspersed chapters that have so disturbed the Muslim world. Two of those are set in Jahilia, the pre-Islamic city of Mecca (*jahilia* means ignorance in Arabic), and two explore the story of a young Indian girl who leads a village of people to their deaths as she seeks to go on a pilgrimage directly through the Arabian Sea to Mecca. Here Rushdie specifically confronts the absolutism

of the Pure in the form of totalitarian Islam.

Rushdie gets to Jahilia from London, not just by postmodern leaps of magical realism but by way of the hallucinations of Gibreel Farishta. In them he is the angel (or is it the devil?) who reveals the contents of the Qur'an (or is it a rule book?) to Muhammad (or is it Mahound?). And here is the salt-into-the-wounds rub: Rushdie's characterizations subvert the Muslim understanding of how the Prophet Muhammad received the revelation of the Qur'an. For devout Muslims, the Qur'an is the very uncreated word of God, revealed miraculously in the perfect language to the perfect passive conduit. (Translations of the Qur'an from Arabic to other languages are considered interpretations only.) Not only did Rushdie set the origins of the religion into a human and historical context, but he also re-wrote the "story" from what Muslims would consider a scandalous secular perspective. Rushdie names his "prophet" Mahound; the name, the equivalent of "nigger," recalls medieval Christian abuse of Muslims (although Rushdie intended for his character to wear it as a badge of honor). His deconstruction gives the names of Muhammad's twelve wives to twelve prostitutes in a Meccan brothel, not only slandering them but also blasphemously merging the sacred and the profane. Further, he suggests that the rules of the Qur'an "about every damned thing"<sup>4</sup> were "received" for the benefit of its businessman leader: "...how excessively convenient it was that he should have come up with such a businesslike archangel, who handed down the management decisions of this highly corporate, if non-corporeal, God."<sup>5</sup> In fact, Minou Reeves, who traces "A Thousand Years of Myth-Making" in her *Muhammad in Europe*, claims that "the whole amalgam of myths that had been conjured up in Europe from the Middle Ages...all are echoed in this provocative work....It is truly Mahound re-born."<sup>6</sup>

Adding over-the-top insult to injury is the Satanic verses episode in which Satan in the guise of the angel Gabriel reveals the Qur'an's Surah 53:19-23. Rushdie is retelling here an obscure incident that some Islamic scholars believe to have a basis in history.<sup>7</sup> While his treatment of the incident is satiric, his "narration," as Simona Sawhney argues, "becomes the text's most powerful strategy for questioning the authority and

transmission of revealed words."<sup>8</sup> The verses in their original form would have allowed the new believers to compromise with the polytheistic paganism of Jahilia by permitting them to seek the intercession of the three primary goddesses in the Meccan pantheon. This compromise would have guaranteed the new community's social acceptance by the Quayresh tribe. However, in a new vision Gabriel (historically)/Gibreel (literarily) retracts them. Gibreel says, "Being God's postman is no fun, yaar. Butbutbut: God isn't in this picture. God knows whose postman I've been."<sup>9</sup> For Muslim readers, it is bad enough that Rushdie here is implying that Islam, like all religions, has an historical and therefore at least partially human origin. He goes further to state explicitly that Gibreel/Mahound conjured up his own visions—and for his own advantage.

In addition, his conclusion is hard to avoid: as Islam has evolved from those early days of revelation into the kind of shari'a law-governed, totalitarian state apparent in Khomeini's Iran, it is actually a satanic religion. If there is any evil, anything satanic, in Rushdie's postmodern world without absolutes, it is a totalitarianism that would crush humans by the absolutism of the Pure. Through his reconstruction of sacred history, he exposes Islam's essence of uncompromising monotheism as that kind of totalitarianism, that kind of absolutism of the Pure.

Edward Said assessed *The Satanic Verses* in the days after Khomeini's fatwa as "a deliberately transgressive work" which "parallels and mimics the central Islamic narratives with bold, nose-thumbing, post-modern daring."<sup>10</sup> However, early on in the furor over his novel's portrayal of Islam, Rushdie qualified his friend's interpretation of his authorial intention and denied that he was insulting Islam. He wrote in *The Sunday Times*, "I have tried to offer my view of the phenomenon of revelation, and the birth of a great religion;...that of a secular man for whom Islamic culture has been of central importance all his life." And in that same article, Rushdie clarifies his imaginative purpose: "The section... deals with a prophet (who is not called Muhammad) living in a fantastical city—made of sand, it dissolves when water falls upon it—in which he is surrounded by fictional characters, one of whom happens to bear my own first name.

Moreover, this entire sequence happens in a dream, the fictional dream of a fictional character, an Indian movie star, and one who is losing his mind, at that.”<sup>11</sup>

Phina Werbner, among many others, agrees that Rushdie is not denigrating Islam; rather, he is drawing on traditions of dissent within Islam to make the same kind of challenges to Islamic dogma that Enlightenment philosophers made to Christian dogma. She argues that “the novel’s ultimate message is one of faith in man as the source of rational creativity...[aiming] not at a loss of faith but at the creation of a foundation for a ‘religion of freedom.’”<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically, William Shepard, writing in *The Muslim World*, argues that the contemporary world of religious uncertainties, both Islamic and secular, has created the kind of spiritual crisis out of which Rushdie wrote this novel. Rushdie sees that Khomeini-style Islam is also a response to this crisis. In fact, Rushdie acknowledges our culture’s struggle with doubt as well as his own god-shaped hole.<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Cragg, the great twentieth century Islamicist, probes this sore spot a bit further: “Just as the religious believer’s faith can be a sustained dialogue with doubt, so Rushdie’s ‘no-god’ unbelieving is a steady engagement in faith....We cannot ponder the satanic and deny that truth matters.”<sup>14</sup>

As Werbner, Shepard, and Cragg astutely perceive, no one can live without faith in something. Rushdie describes his own loss of religious faith, which Gibreel’s paralleled, in “In God We Trust,” concluding that he “thought of [himself] as a wholly secular person.”<sup>15</sup> Ironically, Gibreel’s slow disintegration demonstrates the bitter reality of the god-hole. When the movie star renounced Islam, gorging himself on a banquet of forbidden foods, his illness seemed magically to disappear. However, his restored health was only temporary. Rushdie wistfully continues “In God We Trust” with “But perhaps I write, in part, to fill up that emptied God-chamber with other dreams.”<sup>16</sup>

*The Satanic Verses* reveals those other dreams: Central to them is a vision of a tolerant, multicultural British society, something Rushdie had worked for throughout his career. Even more important, however, is the precondition that makes the work of an artist such as himself possible. There can be no space for the kind of seri-

ous art Rushdie practices without political and social freedom to explore what he wants. Freedom and Art are two sides of the same coin. Baal, the pagan poet of Jahilia and Rushdie’s alter ego, announces, “I recognize no jurisdiction except that of my Muse.”<sup>17</sup> That Muse compels a poet to his work: “‘To name the unnamable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world and stop it from going to sleep.’ And if rivers of blood flow from the cuts his verses inflict, then they will nourish him.”<sup>18</sup>

Rushdie refuses to go to the logical conclusion and name Art as Sacred; indeed, he denies that as a novelist he desires absolute freedom to do anything. Nevertheless, in “Is Nothing Sacred?” he argues that art, especially in the form of the novel, must be privileged because “Literature is the one place in any society where, within the secrecy of our own heads, we can hear *voices talking about everything in every possible way*” and “because it is in its origin the schismatic Other of the sacred (and authorless) text, so it is also the art mostly likely to fill our god-shaped holes.”<sup>19</sup> He is being more circumspect here than his characters. Baal did not care if rivers of blood flowed literally or metaphorically from the cuts his verses would inflict. His muse demanded the carnage. Focusing on his significant intention to explore the birth and development of Islam, Rushdie may not have anticipated that his prose would also inflict deep psychic wounds on the very community of Muslim immigrants he championed. It seems, however, that he too had a Muse who demanded a very high price.

Does Rushdie have it right then? Must we expose the totalitarians, wherever they are found, especially in the mosques across the world and in the arrogant cities where immigrants have made their uneasy homes? Should we exalt individual freedom and creativity so prized in the West? Is it not just such a rational, privatized, modern Islam that we are hoping will emerge to counter the fundamentalists’ obscurantist, violent, and total allegiance—the very kind of Islam Rushdie says he was seeking to re-create?

In one key element of the book, I believe Rushdie has it right—although in many ways he has it so very wrong. His insights are most keen, and even poignant, in his understanding of the in-betweenness, the make-myself-newness of the



immigrant experience. The scene most likely to haunt a reader is Chamcha's, based on Rushdie's own experience as a young teen. As a new Rugby School boarder straight from India, he was forced to eat a kipper under the impassive stares of his fellow students: "By that time he was shaking, and if he had been able to cry he would have done so. Then the thought occurred to him that he had been taught an important lesson. England was a peculiar-tasting smoked fish full of spikes and bones, and nobody would ever tell him how to eat it. He discovered that he was a bloody-minded person. 'I'll show them all,' he swore.... The eaten kipper was his first victory, the first step in his conquest of England."<sup>20</sup> Who of us should not cringe at the image and search our memories to determine whether we have treated someone so badly?

From the first page, Rushdie's characters repeatedly say, sing, or chant, "To be born again, first you have to die." Although his immediate reference is to the Italian communist philosopher Gramsci, the undercurrent of such language is recognizably biblical. Immigrants must die to their old condition repeatedly in order to live in their new one. They become the true survivors who can thereby enrich their new homes. However, they must ask the question, "To what will we be reborn?" Chamcha was reborn as a "bloody-minded person," a hard-hearted secularist who stepped on anyone to get what he wanted, imitating, sadly, of course, the cutthroat English social and economic environment in which he wanted so badly to succeed. Chamcha destroyed his London neighborhood, his Bangladeshi host's family, his friend Gibreel (with satanic verses spoken in a well-voiced impersonation), his wife Pamela, and her unborn child. Then he glibly forgave himself for these crimes as he took up his final new identity as a wealthy Indian landowner, which could only happen, as Muslim anthropologist Talal Asad points out, because of the Islamic laws of inheritance that Chamcha so scorned. Asad's commentary is insightful here: "In such a morality, there is no reason to suppose there can ever be an end to the cycle of destruction, self-forgiveness, and the creation of new identities. When there are no obligations to the past, every destruction is only a new beginning, and new beginnings are all one can ever have."<sup>21</sup>

No wonder we can identify Rushdie's god as the secular god of nearly absolute freedom. Answerable only to his muse, he uses that freedom to foster his art, and in so doing he bloodies the religious beliefs of those Muslim immigrants to England whose plight he is attempting to convey. Rushdie's idolatry thereby undercuts even his sympathetic insights into the immigrant situation. Fixed on his own vision, he cannot put himself in their place so as to begin to understand their injury, sorrow, and furor over his book. Instead of fostering communication, the book cuts it off. Scorn does not win converts to any Faith, even a tolerant, rational, broadminded one.

The characters in *The Satanic Verses* do not ask to what they are being reborn, but they do repeat again and again a parallel question: "What kind of idea are you?" Are you one that refuses to bend? The unbending ones underlie a monotheism like Islam. In the novel, we frequently recognize them controlling, for example, the terrorists who blew up the plane carrying Chamcha and Farishta to England, the Christian creationist Eugene Dumsday, Islamic mullahs, and of course Mahound. Better, in Rushdie's eyes, are ideas that bend and sway with the changeable breezes, that compromise and morph. Says a powerful Jahilian, "I calculate the odds, trim my sails, manipulate, survive."<sup>22</sup> Rushdie is right to ask such a question of both Muslim and Christian absolutes, but we can surely turn the tables and ask the same question of Rushdie's art, his freedom. Doing so, we discover that Chamcha unwittingly provides the answer: Calculating his odds, trimming his sails, manipulating and surviving, he leaves desolation in his wake even as he goes off to happily-ever-after. Even in Rushdie's own reconstruction of religious and secular identities, the flexible idea—modern, rational secularity—cannot be judged less violent than the unbending one.

However, it is also imperative that we ask ourselves the same question. To what kind of idea are we as Christians reborn? Does the "terrifying singularity" of worshipping the one true God imply a closed absolutism? Can privileged Christians sympathetically understand marginalized peoples' particular situations? A quick survey of Christianity and its interaction with other religions reveals the sad reality that our history in

this regard is checkered at best. Nearly a millennium later, the Crusades still haunt Christians' relationships with Muslims. Comments Amin Maalouf, "...the schism between these two worlds dates from the Crusades, deeply felt by the Arabs, even today, as an act of rape."<sup>23</sup> The intervening centuries, which saw the spread of Christian missions and western culture, have only made this perception worse. Contemporary Muslims seeking to dialogue with Christians have been made suspicious by Christianity's context of "crusade, curiosity, commerce, conversion, conquest and colonization."<sup>24</sup> What have we done to others in the name of God?

We have much of which to repent. Nevertheless, to begin to understand "what kind of idea" Christianity is, we must focus on the biblical record first of all. There we find that the costly answer to these questions is the cross of Christ, combining as it does those paradoxical opposites of judgment and forgiveness. The Christian absolute of the Pure is also an absolute of Love. Only the pure God worthy of worship can forgive our sin even though he is the only one with power to judge sin. And an uncompelled love sent him to pay the price of our false worship. We cannot, like Chamcha, forgive ourselves—the very idea is as scandalous and blasphemous to Christians as Rushdie's deconstruction/reconstruction of Islam is to Muslims. However, we can be forgiven while God's justice is satisfied through Christ's sacrificial death. Contrasting the very human manifestations of revenge and bitterness that we see in some *Satanic Verses* characters with the divine way of redemption, we see "in [Jesus'] death on the cross...a love which can only be identified as God's love..."<sup>25</sup> It is only in grateful response to such a gracious gift of love and by reflecting our merciful God that we can attempt to sympathize with others and come alongside them in service.

Because of the cross, we can know the reality of another paradox, that of the freedom that comes from submission to God, a concept that Muslims understand far more readily than Rushdie, a modern man who celebrates freedom rather than submission as both the novel and his defense of it reiterates.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, as David Lyon has noted, "The cross may turn out to have more in common with the crescent than the swoosh or

the golden arches."<sup>27</sup> Jesus stated it most bluntly: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man [Chamcha? Rushdie? me?] if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?"<sup>28</sup> In this regard we may join hands with our Muslim friends.

Salvation and discipleship so described are the abstract ideals. How well we live up to them in the real post-9/11, media-saturated global village of jostling political loyalties, heightened ethnic identities, savage economic competition, to say nothing of dreadful prison humiliation and tortures and of unthinkable beheadings, is the challenge we face. Rushdie, flawed though his vision is when compared to these biblical themes, can give his Christian readers insight into meeting that challenge by his emphasis on the price of ultimate loyalty and the uncertainties of migration. Reading *The Satanic Verses* should send us to the Bible with newly opened eyes, ready to be born again to a fuller understanding of Kingdom living in an age of terrorism.

Rushdie's three central emphases, that of the new birth or incessant change, the nature of the absolute, and the immigrant as a metaphor for the human condition, recur in the Bible. In Acts 10, when Peter received his vision to go to Cornelius, he discovered that he himself had to be converted because he suffered from a sin as deep as Cornelius'. Peter's worldview was shaped by an ethnocentrism that prevented him from seeing that God's universal plan included the Gentiles in the salvation that Jews thought was just for them. Although he rebelled at first (recalling a similar evangelist, Jonah), the born-again Peter pondered the vision, understood, and obeyed.

We too must be converted from our secular idols of paramount individual freedom and from our misuse of words that reinforces barriers of suspicion and distrust between our Muslim neighbors and us. We too are very modern people. Not many of us can pretend to the high art of Rushdie. Our talents are paltry in comparison, and so we are unlikely to be writing novels that command the attention of the world's media. However, all too common and shameful are the televangelists' sound bites, brashly calling Muhammad a terror-

ist or denigrating Muslims and their culture in their zeal to gain media attention and fund-raising dollars. As Rushdie himself learned the bitterly hard way, scorn does not win converts to any faith. Neither does scorn reflect the mercy and love of our Savior; it only reinforces the supposed superiority of the scorner. Even more tempting to us might be a bit of racist speculation about “those people” over the office water cooler. While not as public a sin as those comments broadcast on the air, it is just as harmful, just as wrong.

Worshipping the one true God involved Peter in both hospitality to strangers<sup>29</sup> and in sharing the truth that “everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”<sup>30</sup> “One true God” and “everyone who believes”: these are absolutes of the same order as the Islamic ones Rushdie wanted to expose. Indeed, we are as tempted to worship a finite understanding of our faith as are Muslims and to judge those we perceive as unbelievers. At this most central point, however, is where Christianity parts company with Islam. Because of the nature of the one true God, a God who goes to the cross, our temptation to speak arrogantly about who is and is not saved is confounded by the particularities of love and grace and forgiveness. We must leave the judgments to God.

In order to obey God’s call to visit and be hospitable to Cornelius, Peter had to be dislocated from his comfortable position as one of God’s exclusively chosen people. He was chosen, to be sure, but chosen to “go to him [Jesus] outside the camp,”<sup>31</sup> that odd and unsettling place where today we find immigrants, the outsiders, the dispossessed, some of whom literally live on the trash-heaps or rubble-strewn streets of our world and many of whom are Muslims. The Biblical vocabulary for the immigrant condition is for believers to be “aliens and strangers on earth.”<sup>32</sup> Such people know that their ultimate loyalty is not to self or to country but to God, who rules a better country as yet unattained, a country whose citizenship is open to “every tribe and language and people and nation.”<sup>33</sup> We Americans in particular should frequently remind ourselves of this deeper reality in these days of overwhelming bombast about America’s military and moral greatness. If the Jews were not God’s chosen peo-

ple in the sense that they had believed, we should not delude ourselves into thinking America is his chosen nation either. Holding our citizenship somewhat uncomfortably is a prerequisite to assuming our true migrant identity.

If we live as immigrants ourselves, we will share or, at the very least, can hear the immigrant perspective on the secular and religious absolutes that so oppress them. If we live with them, we will be positioned to tell the story about the God who sees and hears “the misery of [his] people” and, “concerned about their suffering [,has] come down to rescue them.”<sup>34</sup> “Outside the camp” raises the specter of Golgotha, for it was on that desolate hill that Jesus rescued not just the Jews but all his people. In *Mission after Christendom*, David Smith makes a telling case for shared suffering as being the only viable way that missions can be effective in our globalized postmodern world.<sup>35</sup> Phil Parshall is an example of missionaries who have answered that call. He urges Christians to bring the gospel to bear on the very “structures that allow a ray of hope to pierce the deep gloom of hurt and despair that often engulfs the Muslim peasant.”<sup>36</sup> Only when we die to the affluence and power of the West/North will we be able to communicate with the people left behind by the gadgets and playthings of the world, luxuries that seem as natural to us as elite literary Britain did to Rushdie. Smith laments that this willingness is increasingly scarce, but nonetheless, it is the biblical mindset that positions us to minister to the marginalized.

“‘To be born again,’ sang Gibreel Farishta tumbling from the heavens, ‘first you have to die.’”<sup>37</sup> Listening to Rushdie can allow us to hear more clearly Jesus’ call to die to ourselves, to our comfort, and to our cultural assumptions. Gibreel and Chamcha landed on a beach along the English Channel from where they begin their immigrant journey. We may land outside the gate, at home with our Muslim neighbors. It is a risky place to live, and few of us want to give up our comfort and safety to do so. We might have to die to follow Jesus in this way, but Jesus’ gospel is more than mere words on a page. It is worth dying for.

#### Notes

1. As quoted in Ian Hamilton, “The First Life of Salman Rushdie,” *The New Yorker*, 25 Dec. 1995-1 Jan. 1996, 113.



2. Salman Rushdie, "Yes, This is About Islam," *New York Times*, 2 Nov. 2001, A25.
3. Salman Rushdie, "In Good Faith," in *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), 394.
4. Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses: A Novel* (New York: Henry Holt and Co-1st Owl Book ed., 1997), 366.
5. *Ibid.*, 376.
6. Minou Reeves with biographical contributions by P.J. Steward, *Muhammad in Europe* (Washington Square NY: NYU Press, 2000), 300.
7. See early biographies of Muhammad, particularly the widely accepted *Life of Allah's Prophet (Sirat Rasul Allah)* by the eighth century (C.E.) Ibn Ishaq, translated by A. Guillaume as *The Life of Muhammad* (Karachi: Oxford UP, 1955), pages 165-166, as perhaps the most authoritative. Faruq Sherif recounts the incident without commentary under the topic of abrogation (39-40) in his *A Guide to the Contents of the Qur'an* (London: Ithaca Press, 1985), written to help non-Muslims gain an objective understanding of the Qur'an (2). More telling is Surah 22:52 in the Qur'an itself, which seems to make oblique reference to the incident: "And We never sent a messenger or a prophet before thee but when he desired, the devil made a suggestion respecting his desire; but Allah annuls that which the devil casts, then does Allah establish His messages. And Allah is Knowing, Wise—." Nevertheless, many modern commentators vigorously deny both the incident and this interpretation. See, for example, Maulana Muhammad Ali's extensive commentary in his translation of the Holy Qur'an on both Surah 53:19-21 (1002-03) and Surah 22:52 (658) and "The 'Satanic' Verses and the Orientalists (A note on the authenticity of the so-called Satanic verses)" by M.M. Ahsan, reprinted in *Sacrilege versus Civility: Muslim Perspective on The Satanic Verses Affair*, published by the Islamic Foundation in Leicester, England in 1991.
8. Simona Sawhney, "Satanic choices: poetry and prophecy in Rushdie's novel," *Twentieth Century Literature* 45 no. 3 (Fall 1999): 261.
9. Rushdie, *Verses*, 114.
10. As quoted in William Shepard, "Satanic Verses and the Death of God: Salman Rushdie and Najib Mahfuz," *The Muslim World* 82 (Jan.-April 1992): 92.
11. Salman Rushdie, "Personal View," *The Sunday Times*, 16 Oct. 1988, G4. The ultimate irony here is that Rushdie is asserting his own reading of *The Satanic Verses* as the correct one despite the postmodern freedom he celebrates, which gives to readers, including the horrified Muslim believers, the right, even the responsibility, to construct their own valid readings.
12. Pnina Werbner, "Allegories of Sacred Imperfection: Magic, Hermeneutics, and Passion in *The Satanic Verses*," *Current Anthropology* 37, Supplement (Feb. 1996): S57.
13. Shepard, 99. 110-111.
14. Kenneth Cragg, *Troubled by Truth: Life-studies in Inter-Faith Concern* (Edinburgh: The Pentland Press, Ltd., 1992), 149.
15. Salman Rushdie, "In God We Trust," *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Press, 1991), 377.
16. *Ibid.*, 377.
17. Rushdie, *Verses*, 404.
18. *Ibid.*, 100.
19. Salman Rushdie, "Is Nothing Sacred?" *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta Press, 1991), 429, 424.
20. Rushdie, *Verses*, 44.
21. Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1993), 298.
22. Rushdie, *Verses*, 104.
23. Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*, trans. Jon Rothschild (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), 266. See also the Spring 2002 issue of *Christian History* entitled "Christians and Muslims: Confronting fourteen centuries of ambition, sorrow and bad faith."
24. Ataullah, Siddiqui, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue in the Twentieth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 53.

25. N.T. Wright, “Truly, this man was the Son of God,” *The Crown and the Fire: Meditations on the Cross and the Life of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 54.
26. See, for example, Rushdoe, “In Good Faith,” 396.
27. As quoted in David Smith, *Mission after Christendom* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2003), 130.
28. Matt. 16:24-25.
29. Acts 10:23, 48.
30. Acts 10:43.
31. Heb. 13:13.
32. Heb. 11:13
33. Rev. 5:9.
34. Ex. 3:7-8.
35. Smith, 104-115.
36. As quoted in Muhammadous Mensah, “Holistic Ministry Among the Poor,” in *Muslims and Christians on the Emmaus Road*. ed. J. Dudley Woodberry (Monrovia CA: MARC, 1989), 85-86.
37. Rushdie, *Verses*, 3.